



CONNECTICUT

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

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Amy Dowell,

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Co-chairs McCrory and Sanchez, Vice Chairs Barry and Daugherty Abrams, Ranking Members Berthel and McCarty, and members of the Education Committee—thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. My name is Amy Dowell, and I am the State Director of Education Reform Now CT (ERN CT).

S.B. 229 - An Act Concerning the Charter School Approval Process

We support this bill, which would meaningfully improve the process of authorizing public charter schools—a process which is currently so cumbersome and complicated that it unnecessarily burdens communities and families. Charter authorization is unique in Connecticut because it both requires coordination between multiple different entities and decouples approvals from funding. Either one of these hurdles would be significant for a community to overcome when it hopes to open a new school that will meet its students' needs. But having both obstacles in place is unbalanced and unfair.

This legislation would establish a nonlapsing charter school approval grant account and empower the Commissioner of Education to fund charters that have been awarded initial certificates of approval by the State Board of Education—a step that we strongly support.

In addition, however, we ask this body to make the process more fair by removing the "initial certificate" and instead giving the State Board of Education full authority to approve public charter schools. This will allow them to continue their effective practice of gathering community input and vetting the logistics and leadership in advance.

When the State Board and local families work together to authorize a new public charter school, the State Department of Education should automatically have the funding in place to meet those needs.

H.B. 5283 - An Act Concerning the Education Cost Sharing Grant Formula and the Funding of Other Education Programs

We support this bill, which would adopt a student-centered funding model to reduce education funding disparities between districts along racial and economic lines. In 2017, the legislature redrafted the Education Cost Sharing formula in a systemic, bipartisan and innovative way.

Building off this work, and adding additional equity and fairness priorities, we believe this bill represents a critical next step.

Every child who attends a public school in the state should be funded based upon their individual learning needs, regardless of which town they live in. Please pass these revisions to the funding model that reflects our collective commitment to all Connecticut public school students.

S.R. 4 and HR 4 - Resolution Approving the Settlement Agreement in Sheff v. O’Neill

We recognize the purpose of these resolutions, which is to end a decades-old piece of litigation that focuses specifically upon inequities and racial and economic segregation between the Hartford Public School District and its surrounding neighbors. The benefit of this settlement is that it reinforces the importance of every Connecticut parent in the state having the right to choose where to enroll their children and which school will best meet their needs.

However, we must acknowledge that the allocations dedicated toward this settlement agreement are relatively small. More importantly, the settlement solution addresses only a fraction of the ongoing racial and economic isolation, and resultant disparity in educational resources, that continue to occur in public school districts across the entire state. The scope of educational inequity in Connecticut goes well beyond the Hartford region, and this represents one step forward in a long journey toward fairness.

S.B. 226 - An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the Department of Education

Throughout the course of the pandemic, and even before it, Connecticut teachers have shown incredible commitment to the state’s students. Teaching is a difficult and critical job, and districts have often struggled, for decades, to fill specific teacher shortages.

Parts of this bill seek to extend the validity of professional educator certificates and ease the issuance of initial and provisional educator certificates. We therefore applaud the efforts of the State Department of Education to make it easier both to become a teacher in Connecticut and to stay one.



About Education Reform Now CT

The state chapter of a national organization and affiliate of DFER CT, Education Reform Now CT is a 501(c)(3) that operates as a think tank and policy advocate, promoting great educational opportunities and achievement for all by increasing equity, protecting civil rights, and strengthening the social safety net.